From A B S Files

Modernism and the Religious Crisis in Italy.

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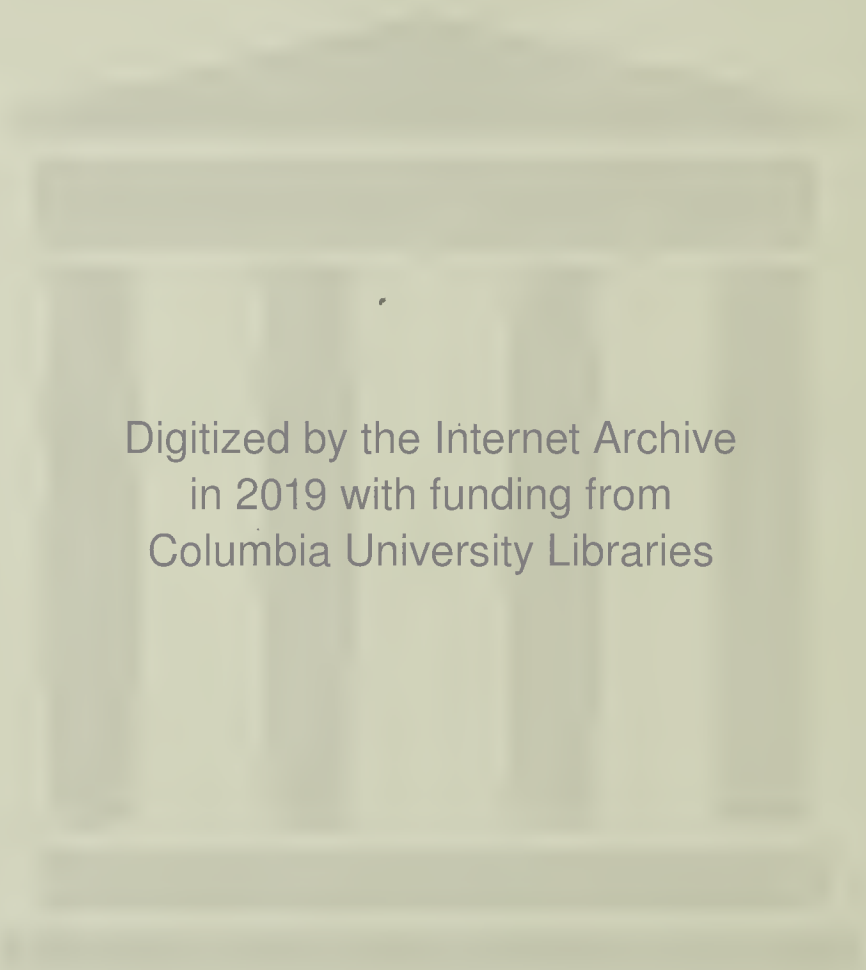
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Modernism and the Religious Crisis in Italy.

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THESE MODERNISTS, WHO ARE THEY?

I do not know if at the present time there can be a subject more interesting and more important than that of Modernism and the religious crisis in Italy; and I am sure our brethren and our friends beyond the ocean will be glad to get some information about it, coming directly from the field where the conflict is raging, and from one who is living in immediate contact with the insurgents.

War has been declared. On one side stands the Vatican, with its traditions, with its fossilized formulas and institutions, with its intolerance, with its political preoccupations; on the other side stand the whole, or nearly the whole, of the young clergy, the seminaries which are preparing the clergy of the future, and the laity, which begins to awaken from its religious torpor; and on this side, and everywhere and in everyone, is a new thirst for spirituality, a feeling of weariness of the old traditions, a longing for formulas and institutions vivified by the Spirit of God, an up to the present, unfelt desire for larger and deeper Christian love, an ardent aspiration to see their great and beloved Church reformed, renewed, and brought back from death unto life. All those who stand in such opposition to the Vatican are called Modernists. What is their ideal? "The ideal which we have in view," they say themselves in their "Programme," "is that of a Church

once more the spiritual director of souls in their laborious pilgrimage toward the distant goal to which the Spirit of God, which is a spirit of brotherhood and peace, is leading them; and our efforts are directed to instil into minds this new consciousness of the everlasting destinies of Catholicism in the world." This Church is, for them, "the Church of their fathers," "which, however," says Romolo Murri in his book, "*La Politica Liberale e la Democrazia*," "must be internally reinvigorated, and externally reduced to right proportions; all extraneous and hurtful elements must be removed from our religious profession, and religion must be presented and made to live as the religion of the spirit and of liberty; in short, clericalism must be fought against for the benefit of religion, which must, above all, be detached from the survival of the political and parasitical elements, which are so multiform and tenacious." To the episcopal form of the "Church of their fathers" the Modernists tenaciously hold, for historical reasons, from inherited tendencies, and from racial inclination.

Now, I am convinced that not all Modernists have realized what transformation Romanism would have to undergo to become a truly Christian Church. I am more than persuaded that experience has much to teach them, which at present they do not suspect they need to learn. But, granted that in the Providence of God their dream should become a historical fact, I cannot conceive what harm there would be in having, in our Latin countries, a strong Episcopal Christian Church, which, accentuating what is essential with the same energy with which, in the past, it accentuated what is accessory, should work in full communion of spirit and love

alongside our Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational Churches, for the glory of Christ and the triumph of His Kingdom. "We are not rebels," they say in an "Open Letter to Pius X," "but sincere Catholics; and, as such, we desire to stand up for the salvation of Christianity." And in the pamphlet, "A Crisis of Souls in Catholicism," after having spoken of the reforms they dream of, they conclude by saying: "These changes will come by the inexorable force of things; and even if men are able but slowly to accustom themselves to them, still these changes will be so vast and so deep as to astonish, if they live some ten years more or so, many of those timid followers who now do their best to retard Catholicism in its forward march."

WHAT SHALL OUR ATTITUDE BE?

Now, our attitude toward this modern tendency in Roman Catholicism cannot be but one: We must seek to understand these Modernists; we must sympathize with them, without forcing them to come out from the Church of Rome. Those who are born in Protestant lands and of Protestant parents can have but little idea of the point of view of those whose ancestral religion is Roman Catholicism, or of the working of a conscience which has been formed and educated in a Roman Catholic atmosphere. They who live in Christ and have Christ living in them cannot always understand the tenacity with which those priests, who have not entirely learned Christ, cling to the principle of an external authority, as a drowning man clings to the plank which supports him. Perhaps we take too little into account the benefits that the Papacy rendered to humanity in her darkest and most critical days,

and therefore do not appreciate enough how fascinating for those priests is the dream of seeing, some time or other, the historic organization of Romanism reconciled with the spirituality of primitive Christianity. In my opinion it is a grave error to urge the Modernist to leave the Church of Rome. It is wise to advise them to remain, as long as their conscience allows them to do so; wise to exhort them to persevere in their protests, to shake the foundations of the already tottering Colossus, to complete the ruin of that tyrannical authority which for so many centuries has dominated the consciences of the clergy and the laity. They must remain and complete with all their strength, from within, that work of destruction and renovation which we Protestants have for long sought to accomplish from without.

Truly, in the whole history of the Church of Rome there has never been a period to be compared with the present one. History records in every period sporadic cases of rebellion, easily hushed up by violence; but now the rebellion is growing fast, is gaining the enthusiasm of the best, is beginning to rouse the interest of the laity. When the old generation of the clergy still upholding the Curia has passed away and the field is in the hands of the insurgents, when the minority of to-day will to-morrow have become majority, what then is to become of the Vatican? It will have either to Christianize itself or die.

I know there are not a few who think that all this is nothing but a huge exaggeration; that all this movement may be summed up in the efforts of a handful of priests who, yielding to the temptations of higher criticism, have left the Church and abandoned

the faith. It is a gross mistake. Listen to this statement, made by a priest in high position in the Church: "Do not make any mistake; in spite of all the means taken to check it, Modernism is more alive than ever. The Vatican is in possession of hundreds of documents proving that a strong Modernist organization has been formed within the Church; that in order to foster the cause of Modernism a kind of freemasonry has been found in the Church. The Vatican has found out that between several churches and even between several seminaries a secret correspondence is kept up with a view to spreading Modernism."

No wonder, then, if the Pope has felt the necessity of issuing a decisive,

A CRUSHING "MOTU PROPRIO."

It crashed like a thunderbolt on Sept. 8, of last year. The "*Osservatore Romano*," the official paper of the Vatican, published it first; all the Italian press reported it, and in a flash the startling document in its general lines was spread all over the country. It was as clear as daylight that by his "*Motu proprio*" the Pope had meant to give the last blow to Modernism.

What is the difference between an "Encyclical" and a "*Motu proprio?*" The difference between the two documents is this: The "Encyclical" deals with doctrine; the "*Motu proprio*" deals only with practical and disciplinary matters. The contents of the papal document may be summed up as follows: After an exordium in which the Pope states that the Modernist Movement has taken in the Church the secret form of a propaganda and of a secret association, the "*Motu proprio*," quotes the part of the Encyclical "*Pascendi*," which refers to theolog-

ical studies in the seminaries, choice of principals and professors in seminaries and universities, conferring of degress, vigilance and censure against Modernist literature, conventions of priests, etc. This, the first part of the document. The second part follows, which contains new provisions against Modernism; that is to say:

(1) A "Memorandum" to the bishops to impress on them the necessity of their taking the greatest care in preparing a young clergy well equipped to fight against error (*error* is here synonymous with *Modernism*). In order to prevent the young divinity students from being distracted by other preoccupations, the "*Motu proprio*" forbids them altogether the reading of all newspapers and periodicals, even of the Roman Catholic ones, including those known as being strictly orthodox.

(2) The injunction to a whole class of people to take an oath of orthodoxy and loyalty to the true doctrine and Roman Catholic discipline. The oath to be taken by all professors at the beginning of their yearly courses; by clerics of an inferior order before their promotion to a higher order; by all new confessors, by all parish priests, canons, beneficed clergymen before coming into possession of their benefices, and by all officials in ecclesiastical courts.

(3) The formula of the oath, by which a declaration is made to accept and profess all the articles of belief defined by the infallable Church, concerning: (*a*) God and the knowledge of God; (*b*) Revelation made evident through miracles and prophecy; (*c*) The Church and the Roman hierarchy, with Peter as its fundamental rock; (*d*) The Christian doctrine as handed down by the

apostles and as interpreted by the Fathers; (*e*) Faith, according to the orthodox definition (an adherence of the intellect to the doctrine of the Church). Besides all this, the formula includes a complete approval of everything said in the Encyclical *Pascendi*, in the decree *Lamentabili*, called the *Syllabus of Pius X*, and a complete rejection of all new Modernist theories, which are with great care specified and with great force condemned in the latter part of the document.

WAS IT A SUCCESS OR A FAILURE?

It was a failure—an utter failure. I shall not recall to you the bold declarations of the Roman Catholic professors at Münster, nor the strong letter of the French Modernist priests to the archbishops and bishops of France, nor the way in which the Russian censure called the Vatican to order; I wish here to call your attention to another series of facts.

The first impression of the "*Motu proprio*" on our Italian clergy was far from being what the Pope had expected it to be. Our clergy knew already too well the ways of the Curia. The seminary at Perugia, where, under the intelligent principalship of the learned Monsignor Umberto Fracassini, exegetical studies were carefully and scientifically cultivated, had been already suppressed; Bishop Gentili, suspected to be a protector of Monsignor Fracassini, had been deposed; from two great preachers, Padre Gazzola, of Milan, and Padre Semeria, of Genoa, the license to preach had been withdrawn; several other priests and friars of note, thought to be dangerous, had been sent far away to England or to South America; what else

was there, therefore, to be expected, if not new and terrible suppressive measures?

Some members of the clergy, when ordered to take the oath, refused energetically, and left the Church. Others grouped themselves together, and, following the example of their fellow priests of France, before taking the oath, wrote an anonymous letter to their bishops and archbishops, in which, after having expressed their motives for their taking such a tremendous step as writing this letter, they concluded by saying: "Before undergoing this act of violence, we protest in the sight of God, of the Church and of your Lordship, that such an oath does not in any way pledge our conscience, nor does it in any way modify our ideas. We shall remain after, what we were before the oath." The largest number of those bound to take the oath took it against their conscience; and the Curia seemed to triumph.

All those who took the oath in that spirit ought to have stood up as one man; they ought to have been led by their bishops against those who had ordered that, with their hand on the Gospel; they should deliberately dishonor the Gospel. But if such behavior has no justification, has it at least some extenuation? Let us hear the answer of an ex-priest who, when a short time before the injunction of the oath he left the Church, had nothing else in this world except $7, which a poor woman had given him in payment of twenty masses, and which the good soul made a present of to him, when he offered to return them to her. "With nothing else than these few dollars did I leave the Church and face the uncertainty of my future. But how many priests and friars are there from whom such an act

of courage might be expected? To speak of martyrdom when there is no peril impending, and to speak of hunger when sitting at a well-spread table, are easy things to do; but when the wolf is already at the door of the poor parish priest, who has nothing else on earth but the scanty income of a daily meagre mass to count upon, who has besides himself perhaps an old father and an old mother to support, who knows that if he leaves the Church all ways will be barred against him and not a soul will he find to give him a job, the question becomes very serious indeed; and if the Curia takes him by the throat, and under those circumstances forces him to take an oath which is against his conscience, the priest will probably commit an immoral act, but the Curia will have killed a man." No, the ex-priest is wrong; the Curia will not have killed a man; it will have made and secured for itself an enemy who, on the great day of reckoning, will fight with the fury of one who has been wounded in what he held most dear and sacred.

And let us not forget the most important thing. Those who have taken the oath are not the whole army; behind them is a large reserve corps, which has not yet appeared on the field; there are thousands, ten thousands of priests, who have not yet been called to take the oath; there is the whole of the laity, which up to the present has been slumbering, but is now awakening fast, and fully sympathizes with the movement against the tyrannical power of the Vatican. What will happen to-morrow? Who knows if to-morrow we shall not witness what could not happen to-day—a resistance of the mass?

Meanwhile, a strange fact is happening. Whilst the "*Motu proprio*" seems to

triumph in a way, in another way it proves to be an altogether dead failure. You all know what has happened in Germany and elsewhere; you know how the Pope has had to come to a kind of compromise with the enemy; but very likely you do not know what has happened and is happening in Italy. We have in Italy a whole class of priests who are at the same time professors in different schools. A great many of these professors have not yet been ordered to take the oath. Why? Because the Curia knows that the larger number of them would rebel against the order and leave the Church. They are all men of independent means, with university degrees, having the doors of all Government schools open to them, and the loss of the meagre income derived from saying mass would be to them an insignificant loss. Do you care to know what is the spirit that animates these noble souls, these cultured men, who have given to the Church the best years of their lives but are not ready to sacrifice for her their liberty, their dignity, their conscience? Listen to these few lines one of them wrote me on the morrow of the issuing of the "*Motu proprio*: "My dear friend, before closing my letter, let me unbosom myself and tell you one thing more. What happens in my Church is more than I am able to bear. I feel that I have had quite enough of this Catholic Church of ours. Every day she becomes more and more a barefaced negation of Christ and of His Word. I feel that to continue to wear the garb I am now wearing and to remain in the society I belong to is not only a lie, but a sort of denial of what the Gospel has of most noble and holy. And since we have to give an account of ourselves to God, I believe it to be my right and my duty to throw away this garb

and to escape from this Roman prison. As soon as the oath will be required of me, I and my friends, whom you know, shall leave the Church. You know what I mean; when I say *we shall leave the Church*, I am only using the current phrase; the real fact is that we are forced to leave the Church of the Vatican in order to remain in and to be faithful to the Church of Christ. Romolo Murri is perfectly right when he says in his 'Commento': 'To leave the Church of Rome is, for us priests, the only way to save the ideal condition of our true priesthood.'"

AUDACIOUS WITH THE WEAK, COWARDLY WITH THE STRONG.

The Curia, at a certain moment, thought it wise to show its authority and to give an example which, through the impression it was sure to make, was expected to prepare the way to wider results. There lives at Genoa a friar, a Barnabite, Father Giovanni Semeria. He is one of the cleverest men, one of the best writers, and one of the most eloquent preachers the Roman Catholic Church possesses in Italy. This man is a Modernist; a fine type of a Modernist. In his books, which treat generally of ecclesiastical subjects from a historical point of view, you find the echo of our best Protestant literature. This man, with his strong liking for Biblical criticism, might have been launched, as many others, into the sea of rationalism; what has saved him has been his love for Christ, his good heart, his charity toward all sufferers who best represent on earth the suffering Christ. For this reason especially, Semeria is the most popular friar in Genoa; he has practically the heart of Genoa in his hand, and is not a man easily to be touched by the Curia, without running

the risk of losing not the man only, but the larger part of the city. This is the reason why the Curia has limited the power of the man by limiting his preaching, but has never dared to attack him in a decisive way. A short time ago, though, the Curia, as I have said, thought of giving a striking example of its power to the rest of the clergy, and chose as its butt Father Semeria. Orders were sent to the general of the Barnabites to exact from him the anti-modernistic oath. Father Semeria answered that he could not take an oath that went against his conscience. The general did his best to persuade him to obey, and when he saw that it was useless, gave him twenty-four hours to think over the matter. When the given time had elapsed, Father Semeria went back to the general, saying: "To that formula, as it has come from Rome, I cannot put my signature; but here is a formula I have prepared, which I am ready to sign; it fully expresses my disapproval of all the Modernistic theories I am persuaded are erroneous, and my positive Christian belief. Are you willing to accept this formula of mine instead of the other one?"

The general answered that he would send it to Rome and wait for orders.

The answer came, and was clear enough: "Either sign our formula as given, or go."

Father Semeria began to make all his preparations to start for Germany; ordered a suit of civilian clothes, packed his boxes, and decided to stop for a while with friends at Münich. Whilst doing all this, in order to perfectly quiet his conscience and to be able afterwards to say that he had really tried every possible means before leaving the Church, the idea struck him that he might write directly to the Pope himself.

He did so; he opened his heart, his conscience, his soul to him; he sent him his own formula, and asked him if he really insisted on forcing him to make such violence to his own conscience by taking the oath of the "*Motu proprio*?"

Father Semeria never expected to get an answer. He had made up his mind to wait for the necessary time for a letter to reach him from Rome, and then leave. But a letter came—a letter in the Pope's own handwriting. In it the Pope allowed him to sign the formula he liked best, and besides gave him his apostolic benediction. Father Semeria unpacked his boxes, put away his civilian clothes for another occasion, and resumed his work.

The psychology of modern papacy may be summed up in a few words: Audacious with the weak, cowardly with the strong. But in so behaving, the Vatican undermines itself in public estimation. Everybody sees and feels that the "*Motu proprio*," which was intended to be the final blow to Modernism, has been instead a means of showing the miserable condition into which the Curia has fallen. Modern papacy is like an old aristocrat, clad in his gorgeous mediæval costume, trying to order about everybody whilst the most do not pay any attention to him, and the few make pretense of obeying, but at the same time laugh at him in their sleeve.

A few days ago I was speaking of all these things to a well-known Roman Catholic priest, a leading man, and well known for his advanced ideas in fact of Modernism. I was deploring the last papal utterances, when he said to me: "No, my dear friend, this is for us all a providential Pope; by such utterances as these last ones, he

will embitter more and more the clergy, will daily reduce the number of those who are still faithful to him, will get discredited among the laity, and will thus bring the Church to the crisis which we are all longing for. Let us pray to God that he may have a long pontificate!''

THE NON-PATRIOTISM OF THE VATICAN.

Italy is rejoicing. All over the country the enthusiasm for the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the proclamation of the United Kingdom is great. Turin, Florence, the two previous capitals, and Rome, with their splendid exhibitions, are the focus of all these national rejoicings. In this general and wonderful concert to which nature adds its mysterious song and its heavenly smile, only one note of discord is heard; and that note comes from the Vatican. The Vatican papers are full of lamentations; word has come from the Curia to say that for the Church and for all true Roman Catholic believers this must be a year of mourning and retirement. Meanwhile, especially in country parts and in the remotest corners of Italy, a legion of priests, either ignorant or hoping to get some material advantage from the Curia, do their best to persuade the poor folk entrusted to their care that in this year the atheists, who stole Rome from the Pope, are trying their best to complete their satanic work by ruining the Church.

You have no idea of how far the hatred of the Curia for United Italy may go. When the Vatican speaks of the King, the mildest expression it uses is that of 2 Thess. ii. 7: *He who now letteth*. . . . For twenty-four years running, beginning with 1870 (the year of the ''spoliation,'' as they call it),

the *Unitá Cattolica*, one of the most rabid papers of the Curia, was issued with a border of black round it, as a protest against the annexation of Rome to the Kingdom; and the ugly farce was only put a stop to when at last the Italian authorities had had quite enough of it. Here is another incident, a ridiculous one, you may think, but still something like another straw that shows the direction of the current. A few years ago the "*Academia Pontificia*" offered a prize to the man who wrote the best essay on an archæological subject. The time given for the sending of the essay had elapsed, and the appointed commission read the several manuscripts. One of them was judged to be far the best of them all, and to it was awarded the prize. All the manuscripts, naturally, were not signed with the name of the writer, but had a motto, to which corresponded a closed envelope containing the full name of the author. The opened envelope, corresponding to the winning motto, revealed the name of a Protestant, not only, but of the son of a Baptist minister, and a young minister himself. The revelation did not please the Pope at all; but the prize had been awarded, the essay was really a superior work, and the money ($200) had to be given. My friend received in fact a nice velvet box, containing fifty French pieces of gold of 20 francs each. He was struck by the fact that not one of the gold pieces was of Italian coin; and having made some inquiries about it, was told that all payments at the Vatican are made in foreign money. Italian coin, there, is not recognized! The thing in itself sounds silly, but looked upon as a symptom it is sadly important; it shows that the lust for worldly power has suffocated

in the bosom of the Curia all sacred love for its mother country as well as for the Kingdom of God. The effect of all this on the nation is disastrous for the Vatican. All these facts alienate more and more from it the heart of the patriots, who well know what the unity of Italy has cost their fathers, and cannot forget that through all the centuries the Popes have too often filled Italy with foreign armies in order to uphold their egoistic pretensions.

"A CAUSE DEAD AND BURIED."

A few days ago I was in Turin, and could not help going to visit the historic House, where, for the first time, on March 25, 1861, the unity of Italy, with Rome as capital, was unanimously proclaimed, and where Camillo Cavour delivered that wonderful speech which will remain in the heart of Italy as a sacred remembrance of a true prophetic utterance. Naturally, in 1861, Rome as capital could only be proclaimed in theory. The Vatican held its Roman States tight, and France was supporting the rights of the Pope with her armies. But Cavour was inspired; he saw what the future ought to be and finally would be: A united Italy with Rome as its capital, and with the Pope in it in a position to be able to exercise his spiritual power with perfect freedom. And whilst I was reading on the different seats of the House the names of the great patriots who had occupied them on the memorable day, I seemed to hear the echo of the striking words of Cavour: "Gentlemen, I cannot imagine a greater misfortune for a cultured people than that which consists in the accumulation in one hand, in the hand of its ruler, of the civil and the religious power. The history of all centuries and of all coun-

tries shows that wherever that accumulation or that confusion has taken place, almost immediately civilization has stopped progressing, has gone backwards, and the most horrid despotism has been established. All this has happened either when a sacerdotal caste usurped the temporal power, or when a Caliph or a Sultan seized the spiritual power." Nine years after this never to be forgotten sitting of the House at Turin, Rome was taken and proclaimed *Capital de facto;* and now, after more than forty years, during which the King and the Pope have dwelt together in the same city, facts have eloquently proved that the Pope can exercise his spiritual ministry with perfect freedom, and that he has all his spiritual rights respected by the State, much more than he shows himself inclined to respect the rights of the State. The true Roman Catholic Church, which is no longer represented by the Vatican, but by the large believing mass of Modernists who wait and pray in the tents of the clergy and in the tents of the laity, wisely expresses herself as one reads, for instance, in an impressive series of letters called *Lettere Ghibelline:* "There is no doubt; it was a great blessing that God conferred on His Church when, through the force of events, He liberated her from that earthly power which subjected the great lordship of the Church to the small interests of a Kingdom. The ultramontanes of Italy fight for a cause which is dead and buried."